DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 426 298 CE 078 058

AUTHOR Huth, Harvey; Denny, Verna Haskins; Nardino, Charles; Bailey, Robert; Street, David; Sinnott, Judy; Spector, Harriet; Trolio, Peter; Dillman, Jenny

TITLE The Care and Feeding of a Successful Collaborative Partnership.

INSTITUTION City Univ. of New York, NY. Center for Advanced Study in Education.

SPONS AGENCY Office of Vocational and Adult Education (ED), Washington, DC. National Workplace Literacy Program.

PUB DATE 1998-02-00

NOTE 19p.

CONTRACT V198A40298

PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS Adult Basic Education; *Cooperative Planning; *Distance Education; *Literacy Education; *Partnerships in Education; *School Business Relationship; *Workplace Literacy

ABSTRACT

In this document, representatives from the four partners involved in a self-directed distance learning program for developmental aides responsible for caring for persons with developmental disabilities and/or mental retardation (the City University of New York, a labor union, an executive employee relations office, and a state agency involved in health care delivery) share their insights regarding why their collaborative partnership has been so successful. The document begins with a description of the Distance Learning Project, which was designed to help learners develop needed reading, writing, math, problem-solving, and reasoning skills. The remainder of the document examines the following reasons for the partnership's success: racial, gender, educational, and employment diversity of the members of the program's central guidance team; philosophy that everyone's contribution is important; appreciation and acknowledgment of all team members; commitment to the project; minimum of individual or agency self-interest among team members; inclusion of time for enjoyment in all meetings; high-level of personal satisfaction experienced by team members; use of effective partnership techniques (road maps, "I-time," go-arounds, brainstorming, flowcharting); and extensive use of technology to facilitate meetings of the entire team, subgroups of team members, and day-to-day contact. (MN)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 426 298

THE CARE AND FEEDING OF A SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIP

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Center for Advanced Study in Education
The Graduate School and University Center
of the City University of New York

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CUNY | CSEA

OMRDD | GOER

Distance Learning Program

CASE/CUNY Graduate School
25 West 43rd Street
Room 620
New York, New York 10036
(212) 642-2937
(212) 719-2488 (FAX)

Civil Service Employees Association, Inc
One Lear Jet Lane
Latham, New York 12210
(518) 785-4669
(518) 785-4854 (FAX)

New York State Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities
44 Holland Avenue
Albany, New York
(518) 473-9516
(518) 473-4490 (FAX)

New York State Governor's Office of Employee Relations
2 Empire State Plaza
Suite 1201
Albany, New York 12223
(518) 474-6704
(518) 473-2568 (FAX)

THE CARE AND FEEDING OF A SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIP

Harvey Huth, Verna Haskins Denny,

Charles Nardino, Robert Bailey,

David Street, Judy Sinnott,

Harriet Spector, Peter Trolio,

Jenny Dillman

Note: Formal publication of this paper will replace this booklet as a reference source. Funding Provided by United States Department of Education Grant Award #V198A40298.

February 1998

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Self-paced Learning Without Leaving the Workplace

THE CARE AND FEEDING OF A SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIP

At the Fall 1996 Continuing Education Association of New York Conference, representatives of the four partners from our project, The Distance Learning Project[1], served on a panel to discuss our project's status and accomplishments. We wanted the audience to come away with an understanding of our work and the content of our presentation. However, comments shared with us following our session, were overwhelmingly focused on our relationship as partners: how well we interrelated and dealt with each other.

We knew our partnership worked well, although we weren't quite sure why. We were having fun at our meetings and looked forward to them. We always seemed to have enough time and energy in meetings to address every item on our often full agendas. All of us felt that this was an experience that had not been matched in other job situations. Nevertheless, we were surprised that what had become obvious to us was so clearly evident to outsiders. When this reaction was repeated at another

---

[1] This project, which was conducted from 1995-1997, was funded by the U.S. Department of Education Grant Award #V198A40298.

conference, we decided to introspect about our process, to bring it to a conscious level and in effect "capture and bottle" our success so that we could apply it to our own future work and that of others.

The use of collaborative partnerships is the current method of choice for delivery of human services (education, health, welfare). Even the business community is increasingly using partnership strategies. Current government grants often require partnerships between organizations. Partnerships provide varying perspectives, different expertise, and often a broader service area.

In this article we will discuss why we think our partnership worked. In addition, because technology played such an important role in our project, we will also discuss how the use of technology enhanced the partnership process.

Project Description

The purpose of the Distance Learning Project, was to demonstrate a model process for literacy training. This process would assist workers facing dislocation or layoff to qualify for and secure better jobs with their current employer or increase their mobility within the health care industry. The project

provided training to Direct Care Workers[2] in reading, writing, math, problem-solving and reasoning skills needed to perform new job functions in a changing workplace.

The worksite, the New York State Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD), had shifted its care of clients from developmental centers to smaller, more homelike, community residences. As a result, more and more work sites are now geographically disparate rather than centrally located. There have been significant changes in job function and increased literacy requirements for Direct Care Workers. Workers now have primary responsibility for planning and managing the consumer's daily living, which includes responding independently to problems needing quick action. Embedded in these job functions is a wide variety of reading, writing, math, problem-solving and reasoning skills. These are the skills that were taught in the project.

To address the problem of geographically disparate workplaces, the project developed a distance learning model that provides workplace literacy training in urban, suburban and rural areas using a variety of print and technological options.

---

[2] The participants were Direct Care Workers (Developmental Aides) and other employees who aspire to Developmental Aide jobs. Developmental Aides are paraprofessional staff who provide direct care to persons with developmental disabilities and/or mental retardation.

Workers learned to select from different options, allowing them to build skills while becoming self-directed learners.[3]

From the beginning, the project was conceived as a four-way partnership between an *educational institution* (the Center for Advanced Study in Education of the City University of New York Graduate School [CASE/CUNY]), a *labor union* (the Civil Service Employees Association [CSEA] representing New York State employees), an *executive employee relations office* (New York State Governor's Office of Employee Relations [GOER]), and a *state agency* involved in health care delivery (the New York State Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities [OMRDD]).

CASE/CUNY had extensive experience in working with basic skills education. For several years CSEA and GOER had been jointly administering a basic skills training program for CSEA-represented employees across the state. OMRDD was selected to partner in this project because the agency had recently developed a competency-based training model with a basic skills component. OMRDD had willing staff and the agency had agreed to provide

---

[3] Detailed information on the instructional design and technological aspects of the Distance Learning Project can be found in our article, Brockman, S. and Denny, V. H. (1996), "Technology and Workplace Literacy: A distance learning model," **Literacy Harvest** 5 (1), 14-17; Journal of the Literacy Assistance Center, N.Y. Additional information can be found on our forthcoming website.

coordination and administrative support. They had been undergoing a process of decentralization and needed to find a means of training without holding centralized classes. They needed a program that was self-directed and that could be done in available work time. In addition, they had a state-wide e-mail system that could be utilized by instructors and students in the program.

Why Our Partnership Worked

The fact that our partnership has worked so well has been a pleasant surprise to each of us on the Distance Learning Program Central Guidance Team (CGT). Though we are professionals from four different agencies, with our own priorities, we have managed to maintain our focus on the goals of this project. Why has our focus not drifted into personal agendas or those prescribed by our separate agencies? Here we pursue answers to this question through a description of the "group culture" that evolved within our team.

Our team consists of nine seasoned professionals from varied fields (labor, management and education). Our team has some racial diversity with two of our members being African American, and gender diversity with approximately half male and half female. Members come from varying levels of administration within their own organization. We met bi-monthly for two and a

half years to oversee the implementation of the project and our meetings generally lasted two to three hours. As will be discussed later in this section, we made extensive use of Total Quality Management (TQM) tools and techniques in our meetings.

We are certain that the techniques we used to structure our meetings helped us to be more effective as a team. But we also agree that other factors came into play; factors that explain why it is that we have each had such an excellent experience being a part of this team. In fact, each of us has commented that this has been the best, or at least one of the very best, team experience we have ever had.

To gain more understanding of our own group process, we identified those aspects of our team experience that seemed to contribute most significantly to our success. These aspects, described below, can be thought of as shared values, or as our "group norms."

Everyone Contributes: Every team member's voice was considered essential to the team process. On the whole, each person's ideas were fully considered and their views respected. During meetings, when someone was interrupted by another, the group gently but firmly reminded the interrupter to wait for his/her turn. This was a courtesy valued by all.

Appreciation and Acknowledgment: There seemed to be an unusually high degree of appreciation and acknowledgment shown to

each other for new ideas and tasks well-done. The effect of this behavior over time was very positive, increasing the safety level among team members. This, in turn, enhanced our creative problem solving process as people felt free to generate innovative ideas without fear of negative criticism.

Commitment to the Project: The team's commitment to the goals of the project can be measured in many ways. One such measure is the rate of attendance at team meetings; the average attendance was 95%. This attendance rate is more impressive when considering the fact that for most of the members of the team, the Distance Learning Program was only one of many other job related responsibilities. In addition, there was always significant travel time (six hour round-trip) for some team members, as we were located at a considerable distance from each other.

Minimum of Self-Interest: The lack of individual or agency self-interest among our team members was particularly noticeable over the three-year project period. While various internal changes were occurring in each of the partners' organizations, the team members were able to sustain their focus on the common goals of this partnership. Additionally, members found themselves adapting to changes that occurred as a result of external factors from both State and Federal levels of government. One of the challenges faced by our education

partner, CUNY, was a mid-project reduction in funding, requiring a decrease in CUNY project staff and additional decreases in work hours for remaining staff. Our agency partner, OMRDD, was in the process of changing the way its consumer services are delivered statewide. Rather than providing services from its large, regional developmental centers, the agency continued the shift to provide those same services in smaller, community-based group homes and individual service units. Although facing diminished funding for human services, facility consolidation and staff downsizing, OMRDD continued, as best it could, to support the Distance Learning Project through all four cycles of training. To a lesser degree, CSEA and GOER were experiencing their own organizational changes during this period. As a whole, the project team found that all partners were affected by each other's changes and made a concerted effort to work together to overcome these obstacles. The team members managed to keep the project on track and the programs running smoothly by accepting minimal credit for their own efforts and making sure that co-members received acknowledgment for their contributions.

Time for Enjoyment: An effort was made to make meetings enjoyable. Some kind of refreshments was shared at all meetings. We always made time for humor and casual conversation, even while adhering to our agenda or "road map." In short, we were relaxed but at the same time focused upon our purpose. This served to

enhance the positive outlook and internal cohesiveness of the group.

A High Level of Personal Satisfaction: Perhaps most outstanding about our teamwork or "group culture" was the high level of personal satisfaction each of us experienced in the project. We each felt a strong sense of ownership for the Distance Learning Program and a certain pride at having been associated with it and each other.

The Use of Partnership Techniques: The use of quality processes was key to the effectiveness of the partnership. Our meetings were planned and conducted with the use of "Road Maps" - a quality process agenda. These road maps included four categories: the issues or topics to be addressed; the meeting technique to be used; the desired result; and the time allowed for each item. These road maps always started with a clarification of roles and responsibilities including facilitator, recorder, and time keeper. The final road map item was always an exploration of strengths and improvement opportunities observed by team members during the meeting.

Using a variety of quality meeting techniques was found to be highly effective in conducting productive, yet efficient, meetings. Although frequently facilitated by our Project Director, leadership of our meetings would rotate among members as needed to take advantage of special interests or topic

familiarity. On occasion a facilitator would ask to step down temporarily during the meeting in order to participate more fully. Meetings were conducted in accordance with an agreed upon set of ground rules developed by the team members. "I-time" was used to allow members to read or consider complex issues prior to opening discussion. "Go-arounds" were used to allow each of us to summarize our own point of view without other commentary or discussion. In this manner multiple points of view were efficiently shared while insuring equal opportunity to participate. We found "brainstorming" to be an especially useful technique which we used frequently. Generating uncensored and exhaustive lists of ideas prompted us to think "outside of the box" and to identify new ways of approaching problems. Decision making, when not readily unanimous, was done by "consensus." When one or more of us was not entirely enthusiastic about a decision but could "live with it," we would proceed. If one or more felt strongly and could not support a decision, this was honored by the group and efforts continued until we could determine a more acceptable solution.

"Flowcharting" proved to be very helpful and highly effective as we coordinated this complex project involving four partners and scores of participants in a variety of work locations across the state. We used flowcharting initially to explore, design, and describe the major roles of project

personnel. In addition, we used flowcharting to clarify the process of providing participant services, monitoring progress and addressing several administrative challenges recurring in the project. A resource person outside of the Central Guidance Team with strong flowcharting skills was utilized to assist us in these activities.

Beyond using quality techniques for our Central Guidance Team (CGT), we also sought to encourage the use of these or similar techniques and principles in all of the on-site project committees. We had hoped that the actions of our CGT would serve as a model for each of the on-site project committees. When communicating or holding meetings with Project Coordinators, we actively sought to model a sense of partnership among the stakeholders identified in the grant. Committees were encouraged to use "Road Maps" in their meetings in addition to recording and passing on action steps and decisions to the CGT. Process flow charts developed by the CGT were explained to the committees, and they were encouraged to come up with their own processes for guiding the project, visualizing their actions in chart form. So, not only was the CGT utilizing quality techniques to maximize our team efforts, we were also teaching these processes as a part of the project. We were on the spot to walk our talk.

Use of Technology by the Partnership: Ours was a project conducted at a distance, not only for the participants and the

instructors in the program, but each of us and the agencies we represented were located at a distance from one another. The nine members of the Distance Learning Central Guidance Team worked in a total of five different locations. No two of these locations were within walking distance of each other. Three of them were in the Albany, New York area; two were in Manhattan which represents a distance of 150 miles. Consequently, in order to maintain constant contact with each other as the program required, we had to make use of all the means of communication at our disposal.

Technology to Facilitate Group Meetings: As mentioned previously, attendance at bi-monthly meetings required significant travel time for some portion of the team. In addition, traveling expenses for a group this size can be prohibitive. We experimented at various points during the course of this project with innovative technologies in lieu of face-to-face meetings to bridge the distance gap.

Teleconferencing was used in a variety of ways. For instance, when one member was unable to travel, she was still able to participate in a meeting being held 150 miles away. The rest of the team met in Manhattan while she "attended" from Albany via telephone. A speaker phone was placed in the center of the conference table in Manhattan to allow her comments to be heard by all. Poor performance of the equipment made this

arrangement awkward. The speakerphone was not sensitive enough to pick up sound at a distance of more than one or two feet; passing the speakerphone around, allowing each person to speak directly into it, interfered with meeting procedure. But with the proper equipment, such an arrangement could serve the purpose of linking one isolated member with the rest.

On another occasion we attempted an "all-telephone" meeting. A multi-line conference connection was established among five different locations. Despite some difficulty in establishing the connections, this meeting went smoothly enough, but one disadvantage was evident: conversations including this many participants, with no visual cues to help individuals know when they can speak up, require very careful management to allow the less outspoken members to participate fully. Otherwise, such a meeting can easily degenerate into a two-way, or at best, a three-way conversation with a large number of "eavesdroppers." Pure listening under these circumstances can become burdensome.

A more successful variation on this conferencing approach involved the use of "sub-groups": we gathered in two or three locations, with as many as six people at each location. Physical presence of at least some of the other team members, allowing a certain, though limited, amount of visual cuing, seemed to enhance active participation by all present at each location.

The potential of the "sub-group" approach was realized to the fullest extent when real-time video was added for an end-of-project meeting. With this technology, everyone in each sub-group was able to keep visual track of everyone in each of the other sub-groups. The result was much more active participation by all of us, despite the fact that our locations in Albany, western New York State, and New York City, were more widely spread than for any of our other "electronically enhanced" meetings. The disadvantage of such video-conferencing was that each sub-group had to travel to a site where TV equipment was available. The site and the equipment involved are expensive and travel to the site can be time-consuming.

A possible ideal solution to the meeting-at-a-distance problem might be to use computer equipment at the worksite of each team member to allow for interactive, real-time video conferencing via modem. This would obviate the need for travel expenses almost entirely and spare the cost of studio rental on a meeting by meeting basis. Such equipment could also serve on a day-to-day basis for the frequent conversations that must take place among smaller groups of team members.

Technology for Day-to-Day Contact: Equally important to the efficient operation of the Distance Learning Program was the fact that we were able to remain in constant contact, on a day-to-day basis, above and beyond our regularly held meetings. A range of

technologies helped to maintain this contact.

The telephone and its accompanying voice mail services were one of two primary avenues for communication between CGT members. At the very heart of the Distance Learning Program's operation was our use of e-mail service. All of the CGT members were "connected" by the OMRDD "All-in-1" e-mail system. This system was supplemented with Internet connectivity and we were thus able to route our messages to each other, either directly within the system or indirectly via the CUNY network and several Internet Service Providers, such as America Online. There was a tremendous advantage to being able to address copies to all members of the team. Timing was also an important advantage: each of us could focus on our e-mail when we had the time for it, as opposed to being distracted by the interruptions that can occur during telephone calls. Another important advantage was that messages, once read, did not need to be printed out - they could be saved in digital form for future reference, or simply deleted immediately. We were successful at avoiding one of the main pitfalls of e-mail systems: overuse, to the exclusion of more personal contact. We recognized that there were times when a friendly chat over the phone provided more effective communication.

An important extension of e-mail capability permitted by today's computer technology was the ability to transfer

information among software applications. For example, the Downstate Educational Coordinator maintained a database including available information on program participants (except for test scores, which were recorded anonymously in a separate database). Reports produced by this database software could easily be cut and pasted into or attached to e-mail messages. When hardcopy was requested, the same information could be faxed directly from within the database. Such simple procedures greatly facilitated the exchange of information among team members and saved a great deal of time and effort.

For many of us, learning about these new technologies was an intimidating and risky business. But by being willing to invest our time and energy, we have all reaped the benefits offered by the technology that was at our disposal. Just as we have accepted the challenge of mastering technology as part of this project, we have also taken a risk in allowing ourselves to sidestep the egos and politics that too often define workplace relationships.[4] As a result we have been able to forge a strong, effective partnership and have been able to deliver a quality product.

---

[4] For example, in determining the order in which to list the names of the collaborative authors of this article, we drew names out of a hat.